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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (7/07): SYRIAN BID TO HOST
INTERNAL PALESTINIAN TALKS

Main Stories:

The three dailies lead with news on the July 6 meeting between Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas and Syrian President Al-Assad in Damascus. The two presidents discussed the peace process in the Middle East. In a statement, spokesperson of the Palestinian Presidency Nabil Abu Rudayna confirmed that Abbas intends to work through Syrian officials to push talks with Hamas. Abu Rudayna added that Abbas plans to meet with Al-Asad and Syrian leaders, stressing that, "there are no other scheduled meetings." Hamas expressed "resentment" at Abbas' refusal to meet with their leaders.

The three dailies report on their front pages that Hamas stated on July 6, that European countries have offered to intervene in negotiations regarding kidnapped Israeli soldier Shalit. July 5 reporting in all dailies noted that Hamas was suspending prisoner exchange negotiations with Israel. In separate reporting in all dailies, Hamas leader Abu Marzuq said on July 6 that such negotiations will be kept confidential and out of the media. In related reporting, the three dailies highlight that Israel began on July 6 to exhume the remains of Hizbollah fighters in preparation of the prisoner exchange deal which will take place in four days, according to a Palestinian source. Islamic Jihad confirmed that the remains of 13 PIJ fighters will also be returned, according to July 6 front pages.

"Reliable" Palestinian sources reported to the three dailies on July 6 that Egypt has ceased efforts regarding Fatah/Hamas reconciliation talks because of the, "American-Israeli veto," on internal Palestinian dialogue.

According to the front pages, Palestinian Authority President Abbas

and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert will meet on the margins of an international summit in Paris on July 13. PLO negotiator Sa'eb Erekat confirmed that the two leaders would meet during the international conference convened by French President Sarkozy to launch a "Mediterranean Union" aimed at increasing cooperation between Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.

Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah highlight on inside business pages, the opening of a USG (MEPI/MENA) supported symposium organized by the Palestinian Businesswomen's Forum on July 6 in Ramallah. The article includes remarks by U.S. Consulate General Economic Chief Jonathan Carpenter highlighting U.S. economic assistance to the Palestinians. Al-Jazeera and Al-Aan Arab satellite TV also featured the U.S.- funded program on their July 6 evening news bulletins.

Weekend stories

Sunday, July 6, 2008

1) Al Quds' and Al Ayyam's lead photos showed an elderly Palestinian woman carrying a baby and leading three children to a, "racist separation wall" opening in anticipation of crossing over into "Old" Beit Hanina neighborhood in East Jerusalem.

Palestinian presidential spokesperson Abu Rudaynah announced to Al Ayyam in a telephone interview on July 5 that Palestinian and Israeli negotiators will meet in Washington in 10 days time, "in the presence of representatives of the American Administration." Abu

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Rudayna added that the meeting's goal is to make a strong push forward in peace talks between the two sides.

In truce news, the dailies reported that Hamas on July 5 denied Israeli reports that it arrested "Palestinian activists" in Gaza to prevent them from launching rockets into southern Israel. Hamas thereby denied maintaining a, "peaceful policy" towards Israel, the papers reported.

Front pages reported that Hamas leader Mahmud Al Zahhar emphasized on July 5 in an interview with Saudi daily Al Watan that internal Palestinian dialogue talks have deteriorated and come to a halt. The Hamas leader charged that officials in Ramallah were, "incapable of holding talks because of the American and European veto," which requires acceptance of the Quartet conditions. Al Zahhar confirmed that Hamas and other Palestinian factions refused the conditions, according to the dailies.

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak decided to reopen key crossings into the Gaza Strip on July 6. The Erez, Nahal Oz, Sufa, crossings would be opened, while the Karni crossing would remain closed for repairs, Israel Radio reported. Fuel and humanitarian aid, including food and medicine would be allowed into the Gaza Strip.

Al Ayyam frontpages a report under the headline, "Israeli settlers bind Palestinian teacher to pole and club him in Samu'" near the West Bank city of Hebron. The assault against the local resident coincided with a rally organized by local farmers, and foreign and Israeli activists demanding that farmers have access to their agricultural lands, the report concluded.

Saturday, July 5, 2008

The three dailies led with news that Israeli Defense Minister Barak has ordered Israeli Defense Forces to destroy the family home of the Palestinian who used a bulldozer on July 3 to kill several Israelis and destroy cars and a bus in downtown West Jerusalem. Legal advisors to the Israeli Government said the move to destroy the East Jerusalem house was legal but warned of the "dangerous" consequences of the punishment, according to coverage.

Al Ayam's front page reports that Palestinian Authority President Abbas asked President Bush to make greater efforts towards achieving a Palestinian-Israeli peace deal. Abbas delivered his message to

Bush via a letter, congratulating the U.S. President on the occasion of July 4.

BLOCK QUOTES:

¶1. Independent Al- Ayyam runs its daily editorial entitled, "Abbas-Assad meeting and Internal Palestinian Dialogue!!" (07/07): "... there are official declarations and... indications that the situation is not yet ripe for [meetings between Abbas and Hamas leader Mish'al], especially since Hamas insists on its positions regarding ...control over the Gaza Strip (by force), and the attempt to impose the results of its rebellion on everybody. In addition, there are enough indications to suggest that Syria will exert strong pressure to achieve a meeting between President Mahmud Abbas and Khaled Mish'al and that the Syrian Foreign Ministry is also ready to make continuous... efforts to establish a new basis... for a new, internal Palestinian dialogue..."

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¶2. Independent Al- Quds carries an editorial by Dr. Diab Nasr entitled, "national dialogue...rights and foundation" (07/07): "...We see that... the Palestinian Liberation Organization will focus [future efforts] on Palestinians abroad and try to bring them back to the homeland. So, we have to renew and re-establish [the PLO] in all [of its functions]: ... it is impossible [to allow] the current situation to continue or the national hopes for freedom and independence will be destroyed. The opportunity to build a secure national future will also be missed... [unless] there is... national unity..."

Walles